

FUNDING SCHOOL-TO-WORK PROGRAMS FOR HARD-TO-SERVE YOUTH

By Jana Zinser

States' laws and regulations can help alternative education programs receive state per-pupil funding.

States' laws and regulations—such as Texas' charter school legislation, California's independent study regulations and Oregon's alternative education laws—can make it easier for alternative education programs to receive state per-pupil funding. This can allow dropouts and at-risk students to participate in school-to-work programs and help states pay for school-to-work systems after federal money ends.

No state laws prohibit funding to follow the students into alternative programs. In most states, because of the historic local control of education, it is up to the school district to choose this option, tally the students in its school membership count and transfer the money to the alternative educational program. Usually this transfer of funds means that the school districts keep a portion of the state money for administrative costs, anywhere from 2 percent to 20 percent. Most of the programs do not receive any local tax funds (although Texas charter schools are allowed to receive some local tax funds).

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In 22 states (Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Wisconsin and Wyoming), charter school legislation opens a path for per-pupil money to go from the state to the charter school after passing through the local school district. The Texas charter school law, like 11 other states (Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas and the District of Columbia), allows the school to receive the money directly from the state. The American Institute for Learning Charter School

Specific Examples	State Money Per Pupil FY 1997	Funding Process	Role of Local School District
American Institute for Learning Charter School Austin, Texas	\$5,613	State to school	None
National Guard Youth Challenge Program Bend, Oregon	\$43.45 daily per student	State to district (3.68% administrative fee) to program	Administrative
Sweetwater Union High School District Learning Centers Chula Vista, California	\$3,600	State to district (6% administrative fee) to centers	Runs the centers; responsible for audits, assessment and quality.
Youthbuild Community Services Consortium Albany, Oregon	\$4,000—\$4,500	State to district (20% administrative fee) to consortium	Approves and enrolls students; passes money through.
Source: NCSL			

in Austin, Texas, is an example of an open enrollment school chartered by the state that receives the \$5,613 per-pupil money directly from the state.

The California independent study (referred to as contractual learning) regulations allow the Sweetwater Union High School District Learning Centers in Chula Vista to provide educational opportunities for high school students (19 and younger) who are not succeeding in school. The learning centers are located at the high schools and require all 11th and 12th grade students to participate in work or community service, along with academic classes. The students are allowed to play high school sports, join clubs, attend dances and graduate with their peers. The per-pupil funding of \$3,600 passes through the district office, which keeps 6 percent for administrative fees.

The Oregon alternative education laws allow schools to pass dollars through to providers of alternative education, both within the school district and privately. The Oregon National Guard Youth Challenge Program in Bend offers traditional academic classes along with work and community service. This program's state amount of \$43.45 per student per day is passed through the school district, which keeps 3.68 percent for administrative costs.

The Youthbuild Community Services Consortium in Albany, Ore., allows low-income youths (ages 16 to 24) to complete their high school education through academic classes while learning building construction. Youthbuild uses formal agreements with the school districts to pass the state per-pupil amount of more than \$4,000 through the school district, which keeps 20 percent as an administrative fee. The local school approves the participation of the students in the program and enrolls them. Most of the students have had serious discipline problems and are sent to the Youthbuild program instead of being expelled.

Despite successful programs, some districts are reluctant to participate in these types of financial arrangements. Sometimes districts do not want the additional administrative responsibilities, they want to retain control over all students or they believe that students will be more likely to stay in school if no alternative programs are offered.

Some districts are reluctant to participate in these types of financial arrangements.

On the other hand, many districts welcome the use of existing state funding for alternative programs because it provides educational options that may better suit the students' needs. Serving as a pass-through for state funds, schools can actually make money through administrative fees without having to provide services for those previously unsuccessful students.

Providing successful programs for dropouts and at-risk students can also help produce a better school report card for those states like Texas that hold schools accountable for performance standards, often measured by test scores and retention, dropout and attendance rates.

Selected Reference

Zinser, Jana. *Funding and Sustaining School-to-Work Strategies for Dropouts*. Denver, National Conference of State Legislatures, December 1997.

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